TOPICAL STRUCTURE ANALYSIS
OF ACCOMPLISHED ENGLISH PROSE

by

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Abstract

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This study analyzes the topical structure of accomplished essays and compares the results with the topical structure tacitly preferred by assessors in their judgments of student essays. The paper examines whether the same patterns of topical structure that are rewarded by assessors in student writing, as reported by previous studies, are in fact used by professionals writing within a similar genre. The results of the comparison help determine the extent to which essays written for such tests as Educational Testing Service's *TOEFL Test of Written English* are evaluated in accordance with the unstated norms of topical structure in comparable accomplished English prose.

Variations in the topical structure of student essays have correlated well with different assessments of writing quality (Schneider and Connor 1991; Witte 1983a, 1983b). Three variations of topical structure are at issue: parallel

progression, in which the same topic repeats itself in successive sentences; sequential progression, in which the comment of one sentence becomes the topic of the next; and extended parallel progression, in which the first and last topics in a string of sentences are the same but are interrupted with sequential progression. Schneider and Connor (1991) found that highly rated essays contained a high proportion of coherence-building sequential progressions and an extended parallel progression that helps return the essay to its main theme.

The sample of accomplished essays analyzed in this paper are assumed to represent the tacit norms of underlying topical structure within the genre. The analysis finds that the accomplished essays contain similar patterns of topical structure to the high-rated student essays in Schneider and Connor's study (Schneider and Connor 1991). The accomplished essays, like the high-rated student essays, contain a large proportion of coherence-building sequential progression and a small proportion of parallel progressions.

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INTRODUCTION

This study analyzes the topical structure of accomplished essays and compares the results with the topical structure tacitly preferred by assessors in their judgments of student essays. The central aim is to examine whether the same patterns of topical structure that are rewarded by assessors in student writing, as reported by previous studies, are in fact used by professionals writing within a similar genre. The results of the comparison help determine the extent to which essays written for such tests as Educational Testing Service's *TOEFL Test of Written English* are evaluated in accordance with the unstated norms of topical structure in comparable accomplished English prose.

Variations in the topical structure of student essays have correlated well with different assessments of writing quality (Schneider and Connor 1991; Witte 1983a, 1983b). In these studies, three variations of topical structure, further explained below, are at issue: parallel progression, in which the same topic repeats itself in successive sentences; sequential progression, in which the comment of one sentence becomes the topic of the next; and extended parallel progression, in which the first and last topics in a string of sentences are the same but are interrupted with sequential progression. Connor (1996: 85) sums up the

variation reported in Witte (1983a, 1983b) as follows: "Significant differences have been found between the low-rated and high-rated essays in the frequency of the three topical progressions." Schneider and Connor (1991) found that highly rated essays contained a high proportion of coherence-building sequential progressions and an extended parallel progression that helps return the essay to its main theme.

Comparing the topical structure of highly rated student essays to professional prose has pedagogical consequences for teaching English as a second language: If student essays with a high frequency of sequential progression are highly rated by English test assessors, and if sequential progression dominates the structure of accomplished essays in English, teachers can use topical structure analysis to help orient ESL students' writing to the underlying structures that build coherence in a way that satisfies the cultural expectations of American test reviewers. In addition, if accomplished American prose includes a high frequency of sequential progression, topical structure analysis may also help students whose first language is English become more accomplished writers. At the very least, topical structure analysis, by training native English speakers to track the topics in their writing, can help raise their awareness of how topical structures can build or

detract from coherence.

Because the results of this study are situated in a pedagogical context—and thus a political one—this paper includes a discussion of the use of topical structure analysis in composition classrooms and a discussion of its political and cultural factors.

The first section of this paper describes topical structure analysis and summarizes its linguistic foundations. The second section explains how a topical structure analysis is carried out. The third section links coherence with topical structures that rely on sequential progression. The fourth section examines the value of using topical structure analysis to teach writing. The fifth section presents the findings and methods of two previous studies that have investigated patterns of topical structure in student essays and correlated them with assessors' judgments of quality. The sixth section discusses some theoretical and methodological issues behind using topical structure analysis in research on writing. The seventh section applies topical structure analysis to a sample of accomplished texts—published newspaper editorials—and describes the patterns of topical structures that recur in them. A conclusion summarizes the paper's findings.

TOPICAL STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

Lautamatti (1978) developed topical structure analysis from the topic-comment theory of the Prague School of Linguistics to describe coherence—the degree to which a text makes sense to a reader. To clarify the semantic relationships between sentence topics and the overall discourse topic, topical structure analysis tracks the repetitions, changes, and reoccurrences of topic.

Although Lautamatti developed topical structure analysis, the Prague School linguists laid the foundation for it by distinguishing theme from enunciation. According to Witte (1983a), Vilem Mathesius used the term theme to identify "what the sentence is about" and the term enunciation to refer to "what is said about" the theme. In a point relevant to my later discussion of the theoretical basis for topical structure analysis, Mathesius maintained that "the theme of a sentence announces `what is known or at least obvious in a given situation and from which the speaker proceeds in his discourse,' while enunciation adds new or unknown information to the discourse,"[1] a distinction that has also been cast in terms of given and new information. Over time the term enunciation gave way to rheme. Halliday, however, distinguished theme and rheme from given and new. The theme is what the writer or speaker

chooses as the point of departure; the given is what the listener or reader already knows (or what is accessible for the listener or reader to know). Theme and rheme, then, is writer-oriented, while given and new is reader-oriented (Halliday 1994: 299). The term rheme eventually gave way to comment, and theme, following the usage of Charles Hockett (1959: 201), changed to topic.

The concept of discourse topic also stems from the theoretical framework of the Prague School linguists. In particular, as Witte (1983a) points out, Frantisek Danes showed that topics of successive sentences can be identified in relation to what Danes called a "hypertheme," in effect a discourse topic, which may or may not be explicitly stated in the text. The discourse topic is what the text, taken as a whole, is about.

Lautamatti (1978) demonstrates the relationship between sentences in a text and discourse topic. Sentence topics, which Lautamatti see as units of meaning organized hierarchically in the text, make a semantic contribution to the development of the discourse topic. Lautamatti (1978: 71) puts it thus:

"The development of the discourse topic within an extensive piece of discourse may be thought of in terms of a succession of hierarchically ordered subtopics, each of which contributes to the discourse topic, and is treated as

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[1] Witte (1983a: 314).

a sequence of ideas, expressed in the written language as sentences. We know little about restrictions concerning the relationship between sentences and subtopics, but it seems likely that most sentences relating to the same subtopic form a sequence. The way the written sentences in discourse relate to the discourse topic is ... called *topical development* of discourse."[2]

The sequences of sentences, Witte (1983a: 319) writes, advance the "discourse topic by developing a succession of sentence topics, sequences that Lautamatti calls topical progressions," which help describe how individual sentences create coherence locally and how all sentences within a text build coherence globally. Connor (1996) shows that coherence can be mapped by using a system of three distinct progressions:

- parallel progression, in which topics of successive sentences are the same, producing a repetition of topic that reinforces the idea for the reader (<a, b>, <a, c>, <a, d>);

- sequential progression, in which topics of successive sentences are always different, as the comment of one sentence becomes, or is used to derive, the topic of the next (<a, b>, <b, c>, <c, d>); and

- extended parallel progression, in which the first and the last topics of a piece of text are the same but are interrupted with some sequential progression (<a, b>,

<b, c>, <a, d>).

The relationship between the progression of sentence topics and the semantic hierarchy of a text is captured in Lautamatti's notion of topical depth. Lautamatti maintains that the sentence topic stated first in an extended text is frequently at the highest level in the semantic hierarchy—it is the discourse topic. Lautamatti combines the concepts of topical progression and topical depth to represent a text's topical structure in a topical structure analysis.

EXECUTING A TOPICAL STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

Connor and Farmer (1990) explain how to conduct a topical structure analysis. In this section, I summarize their approach and present a brief example analysis. Later in this study I use their approach to provide a detailed topical structure analysis of 15 accomplished essays.

The point of departure for conducting a topical structure analysis is the distinction between topic and comment. Topic is the main idea of the sentence—what the sentence is about—which often coincides with the sentence's grammatical subject, as in this case *John*:

John exercises every day.

The topic, however, is not necessarily the grammatical

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[2] Emphasis in original.

subject. Since topic is considered to be a semantic property—a unit of meaning—whereas grammatical subject is a syntactic property, some divergence between the two occurs, as the underlined topic in these examples from Huddleston (1984: 59) shows:

In Queensland one can swim in the sea all year round.

Close tabs are being kept on all the radical students.

In other cases, the topic not only includes the lexical unit that makes up the grammatical subject but also spans other parts of the noun phrase in which the subject is located, as the underlined topic in the following example demonstrates:

The concepts of "inclination" and "angulation" in turns grew out of the techniques of early ski racers.

The noun or noun phrase that typically expresses the topic, which is determined in part by the context, may occur at the beginning, middle, or even end of a sentence. In the following examples adopted from Huddleston (1984: 59), the topic is underlined:

The earth revolves around the sun.

Biologists and linguists agree that language is an important species-specific property.

Close tabs are being kept on all <u>the radical students</u>.

I discuss the methodological issues associated with identifying topics in a later section.

Comment, according to Hockett, refers to what is said about the topic. Just as the topic is often the grammatical subject, the comment is often but not necessarily the grammatical predicate and is likely to span multiple clauses:

> *Coaches attempted to explain <u>the relationship of individual movements</u> within the context of an entire pole vault.*
>
> *The Federal Election Commission has a duty to condemn and punish <u>the illegal fund-raising by President Clinton and Bob Dole</u> during the 1996 election.*

Executing a topical structure analysis involves identifying topics and relating them to previous sentential topics as well as the discourse topic. Witte (1983a: 341 n. 50) identified topic by asking "what is this sentence about?" and moving "from one noun phrase to the next until I found what I thought was a satisfactory answer for each sentence in the context of the whole discourse." Schneider and Connor's study also identified topic by asking what the sentence is about. My analyses strive to use the same

approach as that of Schneider and Connor so that I can compare my findings with theirs.

The relations of sentential and discourse topics are charted using the three kinds of topical progression detailed above. The first step in the analysis is to identify and mark all the sentence topics in the text. The second step is to construct a diagram corresponding to the topical structure of the essay. The diagram, Connor and Farmer explain, is constructed by placing sentence topics with parallel progression exactly below each other. Sequential topics are indented progressively. A topic with extended parallel progression is lined up under the parallel topic to which it refers. When a chart is made to show the topical structure of a text, the progressive indenting represents topical depth. The following chart of a short newspaper editorial illustrates this method:

```
1. Federal Election Commission
2.    both candidates [ref=Clinton and Dole]
3.    both [ref=Clinton and Dole]
4.        the party
5.            ambiguity
6.                explicit language
7.                    the Democratic ads
8.                        Mr. Clinton
9. they [the federal election commissioners]
10.                                    the laws
```

In this chart, the progressive indentation that sets Line 2 off from Line 1 indicates a sequential progression. The vertical alignment of Line 3 with Line 2 indicates that the

topic in Line 3 is a parallel progression. Meantime, the vertical alignment of Line 9 with Line 1 indicates an extended parallel progression. For convenience, in Lines 2 and 9 I have included the referents of the topics in brackets.

TOPICAL STRUCTURE AND COHERENCE

This section links coherence with topical structures that contain a high ratio of closely related sequential progression and explores how sequential progression contributes to coherence.

Sequential progression, Schneider and Connor argue (1991: 416), "helps to develop individual topics by adding details to an idea, thus contributing to the coherence of a text." Connor describes "good prose" as having a high ratio of sequential progression to extended parallel progression, leading Connor to regard topical structure analysis as an effective strategy that ESL writers can use to revise their texts. Connor's observation is confirmed by Mäkinen's finding (1995) that the poorer writers in her study used a higher ratio of parallel progression. Similarly, Harama and Anthony argue that since sequential shifts of topic are conventional in English texts, "it has been observed that novice writing by ESL students is characterized by a great deal of repetition and thus parallel text structure,"

resulting in their teachers finding passages of their essays "illogical" and "unclear." Harama and Anthony's analysis accounted for these logical digressions in terms of topical structure and topic unity, even though the teachers perceived only lapses of logic in the student essays.

The author of two influential books on academic and professional writing, Joseph M. Williams, advocates the use of sequential progression to manage the flow of information across sentences. For Williams, sequential progression is not only about developing individual topics by adding details to an idea but also about tightly fusing sentences into a coherent whole and placing new information in a syntactic slot that emphasizes it—the end of the sentence.

In *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace* (1990: 47-48), Williams provides a compelling example that demonstrates how sequential progression binds sentences together to create coherence. Williams begins his demonstration with two example sentences that contain the same information, the first (a) written in the passive voice, the second (b) in the active:

a. A black hole is created by the collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble.

b. The collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble creates a black hole.

Then Williams presents the following context and wonders

whether our sense of coherence suggests that we use (a) or

(b) for sentence (2):

> (1) Some astonishing questions about the nature of the
> universe have been raised by scientists exploring the
> nature of black holes in space. (2a/b) -- (3) So much
> matter compressed into so little volume changes the fabric
> of space around it in profoundly puzzling ways.

Williams lays out his answer and his argument thus:

> Our sense of coherence should tell us that this context
> calls not for the active sentence, but for the passive. And
> the reasons are not far to seek: The last part of sentence
> (1) introduces one of the important characters in the
> story: black holes in space. If we write sentence (2) in
> the active voice, we cannot mention black holes again until
> its end, as the object of an active verb:

> (2b) The collapse of a dead star … creates a black hole.

> We can improve the flow between sentences (1) and (2) if we
> shift that object in sentence (2) – a black hole – to the
> beginning of its own sentence, where it will echo the last
> few words of sentence (1). We can do that by making black
> hole the subject of a passive verb:

> the nature of back holes in space. A black hole is created
> by the collapse of a dead start (or … when a dead star
> collapses).

> By doing that, we also move to the end of sentence (2) the
> concept that will open sentence (3), and thereby create a
> tight conceptual link between those two sentences:

> the nature of black holes in space. A black hole is created
> by the collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no
> larger than a marble. So much matter compressed into so
> little volume changes the fabric of space....

When a writer must make a choice between the active and passive voice, Williams argues, writers should give priority to the construction that helps the reader fuse the separate sentences into a unified whole. Williams goes on to present two complementary principles that coincide with Schneider and Connor's view: Put given information at the beginning of a sentence, and put new information, or information that you want to emphasize, at the end—"perhaps the information that you will expand on in your next sentence" (Williams 1990: 48).

As Williams makes clear, the imperative to use sequential progression to build coherence stands in contrast to a widely repeated prescription of writing teachers: Use the active, not the passive, voice. Williams argues that the use of sequential progression to foster coherence supersedes the exhortations of traditional writing teachers to write in the active voice. In this way, topical structure analysis helps move composition instructors past prescriptive rules, focusing instead on descriptive rules about the properties of written texts and how to teach the descriptive rules to improve the flow of sentences within a text, develop ideas with details, and create tighter conceptual bonds between sentences.

Land and Whitley (1998) write: "Research suggests that evaluative focus on sentence-level mechanics may be a waste

of the teacher's time (Robb, Ross, & Shortreed, 1986) and confusing and even harmful to students (Land & Evans, 1987; Zamel, 1985). Thus, against all the forces that seem to keep our attention riveted on surface concerns, good pedagogy demands that we respond to larger features of our students' texts. As we learn to rid ourselves of surface-level tunnel vision, we will have to struggle against the forces that can lead us to rigid, oversimplified notions of how essays should be structured: rhetoric-level myopia."

The suggestion in Land and Whitley's words, written in 1998, that some composition teachers are still focusing on mechanics come as a something of a surprise after nearly three decades of composition research that effectively shifted the focus from schoolmarmish prescriptions and students' products to writers' cognitive and creative processes and their dialogic, multicultural voices. The next section explores the relationship of topical structure analysis to the pedagogy and politics of composition.

TOPICAL STRUCTURE ANALYSIS AND PEDAGOGY

Topical structure analysis evolved as a pedagogical tool when the focus of composition in the classroom shifted from product to process. The process-centered paradigm, Connor writes (1987: 677), "emphasizes recursiveness in the writing process." As a revision strategy, topical structure analysis

fits well in an approach to teaching writing that shifts the focus from style, mechanics, and linearity to discovery, context, and recursion.

Several studies show that students can use topical structure analysis to improve their writing. Connor and Farmer (1990) found that being aware of and using extended parallel progression helped students to focus their writing while regulating the ratio of parallel to sequential progressions helped them to develop their compositions better. The use of topical structure analysis, Connor (1996: 87) says, makes students more careful and critical readers of their own work, and Connor and Farmer (1990) recommend the use of topical structure analysis as a revision strategy in college writing classes.

In a case study of applying topical structure to English compositions during one-on-one conferences with a student who spoke Chinese as her first language but was studying English at a technical college in Taiwan, Yi-hui Florence Chiu (2004: 162) found that the student became more confident about how to develop her ideas and could "revise her ideas dramatically."

Some composition instructors have begun teaching topical structure analysis as a revision strategy to their students, especially in ESL classrooms. "Knowledge of topical structure on the part of teachers and students,"

Harama and Anthony write, "can provide a potent tool for communicating about textual coherence."

But at the same time that the focus of composition instruction shifted from product to process, linguistic research on writing began to focus on cultural differences, giving rise to contrastive rhetoric, an area of research that "identifies problems in composition encountered by second language writers and, by referring to the rhetorical strategies of the first language, attempts to explain them" (Connor 1996: 5). The research, set off by Robert Kaplan in his 1966 paper, *Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education*, emphasizes that "writing is done distinctly by people from different cultures" (Simpson 2004: 432).

Teaching ESL students to use topical structure analysis to build coherence by combining sequential progression with extended parallel progression helps acculturate them to the expectations of academic English audiences. But there is "an ideological problem regarding which norms and standards should be taught, because the teaching of norms invokes the danger of perpetuating established power hierarchies. ... Recent critics of contrastive rhetoric have blamed contrastive rhetoricians for teaching students to write for native English speakers' expectations instead of expressing their own native lingual and cultural identities" (Connor 2002: 505). Contrastive rhetoric researchers maintain that

cultural differences need to be explicitly taught to give the EFL writers the means to fulfill English readers' expectations (especially those evaluating TOEFL tests).

The value that researchers and educators put on using sequential progression and extended parallel progression to build coherence might be specific to English—other structures are equally valid, they just might not fulfill the expectations of English readers.

FINDINGS AND METHODS OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

This section briefly presents the methods and findings of previous studies that have investigated patterns of topical structure and correlated them with assessors' judgments of essay quality. The two most prominent studies are Schneider and Connor (1991) and Witte (1983a, 1983b). Their findings are contradictory: Witte found that low-rated essays contained more sequential progressions than high-rated essays; Schneider and Connor found the opposite.

Specifically, in a controlled study of the revision strategies used by 80 first language student writers, Witte (1983a) found a significant difference in the mean percentage of topical units, or t-units, in sequential progressions: 15 percent more of the t-units appear in sequential progressions in the low-score revisions than in the high-score revisions. In other words, high-rated essays

contained significantly more parallel and extended parallel progressions than the low-rated essays, which used more sequential progression. In additional research on first language writing, Witte (1983b), applying topical structure analysis, again found that low-rated essays contained more sequential progressions than high-rated essays.

The results of Witte's exploratory research stand in contrast to those of Schneider and Connor (1991). In a study of essays written for the Test of Written English (TWE) and evaluated by Educational Testing Services (ETS), Schneider and Connor found that while the low-, medium- and high-rated essays did not differ significantly in the proportion of extended parallel topics, they did differ significantly in the proportion of parallel and sequential progression. Specifically, the medium- and low-rated essays contained a greater proportion of parallel topics than did the high-rated essays, which contained a greater proportion of sequential progression.

Schneider and Connor questioned Witte's criteria for coding progressions, suggesting that imprecision may have contributed to his different conclusion. In response, Schneider and Connor not only formalized their criteria for coding progressions but also, in analyzing the sample essays in their study, proposed that there are three categories of sequential progressions: directly related, indirectly

related, and unrelated topics. Schneider and Connor (1991: 422) present the categories in the following way:

> "*Directly related* sequential progressions include (a) neighboring topics related by topic-comment patterns (the comment of the previous sentence becoming the topic of the following sentence), (b) word deviations (*science*, *scientists*), and (c) part-whole relations (*these groups*, *housewives*, *children*, and *old people*). *Indirectly related* sequential topics are related by semantic set (*scientists*, *their inventions and discoveries*, and *the invention of the radio, telephone, and television*). Finally, *unrelated* sequential topics are those not clearly related to either the previous sentence topic or the discourse topic."[3]

(Simpson (2000) identifies a fourth progression—extended sequential progression—in which the comment of a clause becomes the topic of a non-consecutive clause.)

It is only natural that the extent to which a sequential topic is related to the comment of the previous sentence affects coherence and perceptions of quality, and this variable may help explain the difference between Witte's and Schneider and Connor's results. When the topic of the new sentence is closely related to the comment of the previous sentence and related to the discourse topic, the sequential progression builds coherence. However, when the topic of the new sentence is not closely related to the comment of the previous sentence or is not directly related to the discourse topic, the sequential progression would

likely undermine coherence by dashing the expectations of the reader—much more so than using a parallel progression or an extended parallel progression. "Not all sequential topics contribute equally to the coherence of a text," Schneider and Connor (1991: 422) write.

Schneider and Connor formalized the criteria for categorizing topical progressions into the following coding guidelines, excerpted from Schneider and Connor (1991: 427):

T-Units (T)

1. Any independent clause and all its required modifiers.

2. Any non-independent clause punctuated as a sentence (as indicated by end punctuation).

3. Any imperative.

Parallel Progression (P)

1. Any sentence topic that exactly repeats, is a pronominal form, or is a synonym of the immediately preceding sentence topic.

2. Any sentence topic that is a singular or plural form of the immediately preceding sentence topic.

3. Any sentence topic that is an affirmative or negative form of the immediately preceding sentence topic (e.g., artists, no artists).

4. Any sentence topic that has the same head noun as the immediately preceding sentence topic (e.g., the ideas of scientists, the ideas of artists; the contributions made by scientists, the contributions made by artists).

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[3] Emphasis in original.

Sequential Progression (S)

1. Any sentence topic that is different from the immediately preceding sentence topic, that is, not (1)-(4), or P.

2. Any sentence topic in which there is a qualifier that so limits or further specifies an NP that it refers to a different referent (e.g., a nation; a very small, multi-racial nation, referring to two different nations).

3. Any sentence topic that is a derivation of an immediately preceding sentence topic (science, scientists).

4. Any sentence topic that is related to the immediately preceding sentence topic by a part-whole relationship (e.g., these groups, housewives, children, old people).

5. Any sentence topic that repeats a part but not all of an immediately preceding sentence topic (e.g., science and art, science, art).

Extended Parallel Progression (Ex)

Any sentence topic that is interrupted by at least one sequential topic before it returns to a previous sentence topic.

In the analysis of the topical structure of accomplished essays that I present later in this paper, I adhere as closely as possible to the above coding guidelines in an attempt to replicate Schneider and Connor's identification and categorization of topical progressions and to provide the basis for comparing my findings to theirs. This essay

sets aside Witte's different findings for the following reasons:

- Witte's was an exploratory study and his results can be seen as superseded by Schneider and Connor.

- Witte's analysis did not use formal criteria for categorizing progressions.

- Witte's analysis did not distinguish between related and unrelated sequential progressions, a variable that may have affected his findings.

- Composition instructors have begun teaching topical structure analysis as a composing and revision strategy. The teaching emphasizes that sequential progressions that are related to the previous comment as well as the discourse topic build coherence.

- High-profile textbooks on writing, such as Williams (1990), Williams (2002), and Kopple (1989), advocate the use of sequential progression to develop ideas, add detail, fuse sentences together, and build coherence.

For Schneider and Connor's explanations of the differences between their findings and Witte's, see Schneider and Connor (1991: 418-423).

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

This section looks at some of the theoretical and

methodological issues behind using topical structure analysis as a research device and discusses how I dealt with these issues in my analysis of accomplished texts. The key issues are perceptions and interpretations of coherence; the identification of sentential topics and the psychological plausibility of topic; problems associated with identifying the discourse topic of a text and relating sentential topics to it; the possibility that there are different kinds of sequential progression; and finally puzzles around sequential progressions that are completely unrelated but still seem to create coherence.

Perceptions of Coherence

In this essay, coherence is taken to be, following van Dijk (1977: 93), a semantic property of discourse formed through the interpretation of each individual sentence relative to the interpretation of other sentences. Interpretation implies interaction between the text and the reader, and it is within this theoretical perspective, as opposed to focusing solely on the text, that this study as well as the studies of Witte and Schneider and Connor take place. In analyzing topical structures, there can be a disjunction between what the writer, at the time of production, considers (or intends) to be the discourse or sentential topic and what the reader, at the time of consumption,

considers to be the topic. Connor (1996: 84) maintains that definitions of coherence emphasizing interaction between reader and text have become dominant.

But to a certain extent, the emphasis on interpretation in this study and in those of Witte and Schneider and Connor places the burden on the reader and, accordingly, makes the notion of coherence inherently perceptual—and possibly determined by the reader's expectations, which may in turn be influenced by context, culture, and probably a host of other factors that cannot be isolated—such as simply what's on the mind of the reader. Connor (2002: 497) says that a major finding of the past 30 years of contrastive rhetoric is that "readers' expectations determine what is perceived as coherent, straightforward writing." Perceptions of coherence, it seems, can vary by reader. Because the extent to which a given topical progression is interpreted as contributing to the coherence of a text depends on the reader, the text, and the interaction between two, additional comments about coherence appear in the sections below.

Identification of Sentential Topic

In linguistic analysis, interpretation can be an unreliable guide. In Witte (1983a) and Schneider and Connor (1991), the identification of sentential topic rests on the use of

interpretation to determine what a given sentence is
about. Although Witte's and Connor and Schneider's research
found high interrater reliability in identifying sentential
topic—86.5 percent in Witte's work (1983b) and 88.9 percent
in Connor and Schneider's research—reliability is likely to
diminish in proportion to the increase in syntactic,
semantic, and topical complexity that comes with
accomplished essays. The statement that Schneider and Connor
(1991) provided about how they identified topics was by
asking what the sentence (or T-unit) is about.

Nunan (1994: 31) found that students who were native
English speakers and students who spoke English as a second
language largely agreed when asked to identify the topics of
a sample set of English sentences. Nunan sums up his
findings as follows (1994: 31): "While there is a greater
degree of variation among the second language speakers, the
majority decision of the group on which was the topic of the
sentence coincided with the native speaker group in all
instances" except one. Where divergent identifications
emerged, Nunan maintains (1994: 34), they suggest that a
reader-based factor, such as background knowledge, is
implicated in the choice of preferred topic. In other
divergent cases, he says, "lack of consensus can be
attributed to linguistic factors such as the appositional
nature of a given sentences, where two competing NPs are

synonyms" (1994: 34).

Schneider and Connor (1991: 423-424 n. 3) acknowledge that they developed "simplified notions of `topic' suitable for empirical testing." But while it may have been possible, even preferable, to apply a simplified notion of topic to pre-college student essays, its application to accomplished essays, with their inherent complexity, can quickly become an unprincipled matter, making comparisons of topical structures between accomplished essays and student essays problematic.

In fact, even in the comparatively simple essays of students, identifying topic is not necessarily a straightforward task. Consider the following sentence:

However, this will not be possible without <u>some understanding of biology, physics, or physiology</u>.

This passage appears as part of a sample topical analysis of a student essay in Schneider and Connor (1991: 420). They select the underlined segment as the sentence's topic—a choice that clashes with my own interpretation, which points to the referent of *this*, whatever it may be, as the topic and *possible without some understanding of biology, physics, or physiology* as the comment.

There are two guides that can help make the topics of sentences explicit. The first cue is the possibility, even

statistical likelihood, that the topic coincides with the sentence's grammatical subject. Huddleston (1984:60) offers a second device: an initial *as for*. It is likely that the topic coincides with the grammatical subject of the sentence as written or in a syntactically reorganized form, and this guide can be used to help isolate a topic if it remains ambiguous after asking what the sentence is about.

Beginning a sentence with an *as for* phrase and finding an appropriate object for it usually separates the sentence's topic from other possibilities and forces it to become explicit. In the following sentence, for instance, it is difficult to determine, using intuition alone, whether the topic is *one student* or *the committee*:

There should be at least one student on the committee.

Starting this sentence with *as for* and finding a suitable and plausible object for it from the words in the sentence helps reveal the topic:

As for the committee, there should be at least one student on it.

The competing possibility, *As for (the, a, one, at least one) student, there should be at least one on the committee*, is an implausible rephrasing: It adds more to the sentence

than is already there.

The *as for* device is particularly powerful in demonstrating that the subject of a sentence need not be its topic:

Nobody likes John.

*As for nobody, nobody likes John.

As for John, nobody likes him.

In Queensland one can swim in the sea all year round.

*As for one, in Queensland one can swim in the sea all year round.

As for Queensland, one can swim in the sea all year round there.

Close tabs are being kept on all the radical students.

*As for close tabs, they are being kept on all the radical students.

As for all the radical students, close tabs are being kept on them.

However, none of the three guides for identifying topic—interpretation, the *as for* device, the subject—are infallible: They cannot always help identify the topic. Consider this sentence:

There seems to be nobody around.

This sentence seemingly has neither a topic nor a comment. The subject of the sentence is the slot filler "there," a so-called "dummy" subject that has no identifiable meaning of its own.

The *as for* device provides little insight here. We've already ruled out the sentence *As for there, there seems to be nobody around* as an impossible phrasing. The other possibilities, *as for around, there seems to be nobody* and *as for nobody, there seems to be nobody around* are equally impossible phrasings.

Intuition, I suppose, points to *nobody*, but Huddleston argues that it would be absurd to suggest that in uttering a sentence like this (Huddleston's example was *Nobody likes John*) "I would be saying something about *nobody*" (1984: 59).

In the process of determining a sentence's topic while I analyzed the accomplished essays in this study, it was helpful to eliminate certain potential topics by asking if they were merely syntactic slot fillers, such as *it* in *It is time she had her hair cut* and *there* in *There should be at least one student on the committee*.[4] Schneider and Connor (1991: 423-424 n. 3) did likewise. They found that although the topic often corresponded to the grammatical subject of the t-unit, "there were systematic cases in which it did not, e.g., cleft sentences, the anticipatory pronoun it, the

introductory word *there*, and introductory phrases such as *I believe*, *I think*," and so forth.

However, the rhetorical ploys used in the newspaper editorials I analyzed further complicated the decision-making process of identifying topic. At times, I had to resort to mentally reorganizing the syntax of sentences to abstract away from constructions used for rhetorical effect, particularly questions and imperatives.

The complexities of the accomplished essays sometimes forced me to go beyond merely asking "what the sentence is about" to identify topic. In choosing the topic in sentences where the topic was ambiguous between the sentential subject and another element, in my analysis I resorted to choosing the sentential subject as the topic. Although I mention these processes here to reveal how I made decisions about topic, they cannot stand, without additional investigation, as principled methods for topical identification. The fact of the matter is that the often complex syntax and the presence of multiple topics in accomplished prose, coupled with the burden of interpretation, makes the task of identifying topic in any principled way problematic.

The interpretive nature of sentential topic identification thus renders cross-study comparisons of topical structure difficult. The findings in this essay and

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[4] These examples are from Huddleston (1984:59).

their comparison with those of Schneider and Connor should be seen in this somewhat shadowy light. It is nevertheless my hope that in identifying sentential topics, I carried out the task not only in the same manner as Schneider and Connor but also with at least something of a uniform degree of subjectivity across the essays I analyzed. Before I began to chart the topical structure of the accomplished essays used in the study, I practiced identifying topics and progressions on three other editorials not included in the study.

Relating Sentential Topics to Discourse Topic

Relating sentential topics to discourse topics poses another methodological problem. It has the following complications, each of which will be briefly discussed in turn: The discourse topic, or D-topic, may not be the first sentence of the text; the D-topic may surface as a comment but not a topic; and the D-topic may not be explicitly stated in the text.

The discourse topic may not appear in the first sentence. As mentioned above, Lautamatti maintains that the sentence topic stated first in an extended text is frequently at the highest level in the semantic hierarchy of subtopics, an assumption which Schneider and Connor seem to have taken to imply that in unaccomplished prose, the first

sentence is the D-topic of the text.

It seems likely, however, that the chances of the first-stated sentence topic being highest in the semantic hierarchy diminishes with the length and organizational complexity of the text. Accomplished writers may, for instance, begin an exposition with an anecdote that only alludes to or foreshadows the D-topic.

If the discourse topic is not present in the first sentence, as was often the case in the accomplished essays I analyzed below, then it becomes more difficult to relate sentential topics to the discourse topic. To address this complication, in my analyses of the accomplished texts I recorded the discourse topic above the chart of topical progressions to ensure that it, and not the first sentence of the text, is seen as the highest level in text's semantic hierarchy. Thus, an extended parallel progression, which Schneider and Connor say reminds the reader of an important earlier topic and provides closure when it occurs at the end of a text, should be considered as much in relation to the discourse topic as to the first sentential topic. Indeed, as van Dijk points out, a sentence declaring the topic of a passage may appear after a passage, confirming "the hypothetical topic established by the reader" (1977: 136).

Another reason for framing D-topic as an abstract unit instead of as the first sentence is that it may occur as a

comment without ever appearing as a topic. Further: It may not appear in the text at all. "Such [topical] sentences need not occur," van Dijk (1977: 136) finds in his investigation. And Witte (1983a: 317) points out that "discourse topics do not reside in the text alone, but rather reflect the interaction of text features with the reader's knowledge," which entails, if Witte is correct, that coherence—the degree to which a text makes sense to a reader—does not lie in the text alone. As Brown and Yule (1983: 110) put it: "Neither the topic representation nor the semantic representation of the whole text derive from anything more formal than the analyst's interpretation of what the text means." The reliance on interpretation to identity discourse topics creates methodological problems deserving investigation. For one thing, different analysts are likely to have different interpretations of what a passage's discourse topic is. Identifying the discourse topic by formulating a topic sentence for the discourse "inevitably produces a variety of different, though certainly related, interpretations of what must be included in the single 'topic' sentence" (Brown and Yule 1983: 110). A full enquiry into the reliance on interpretation to identify discourse topic is beyond the scope of this paper.

ANALYSIS OF ACCOMPLISHED TEXTS

This section applies topical structure analysis to 15 accomplished texts, summarizes the patterns of topical structures that recur in them, and compares the patterns with the student essays studied by Schneider and Connor. In choosing a set of accomplished texts, I have attempted to match several significant factors in Schneider and Connor's study. First, to the extent possible I sought to match genre. The ESL student essays were expository, written in response to an ETS test that asked for a comparison and contrast of the contributions of artists and scientists to society. Second, I tried to match the mean length, measured in t-units, of the 59 essays studied by Schneider and Connor, who used a statistical procedure to adjust for length, discounting the fact that the high-rated essays contained an average of just over twice as many t-units per essay as the low-rated essays. The mean length in t-units of Schneider and Connor's 59 essays was 14.11. I selected 15 newspaper editorials in order to match genre loosely and length tightly.

In my analysis, I used t-units as the unit of analysis instead of sentences and followed Schneider and Connor's (1991: 427) guidelines for coding them: "A t-unit is (i) any independent clause and all its required modifiers; (ii) any

non-independent clause punctuated as a sentence (as indicated by end punctuation); (iii) any imperative." The rationale for using t-units is that they distinguish between simple and compound sentences, allowing clauses separated by coordinating conjunctions such as and or by semicolons— clauses that could naturally be broken into two distinct sentences without semantic or syntactic implications—to be evaluated as complete topic-bearing units. T-units thus enable the analyst to avoid the topical conflicts that would otherwise occur between competing sentential clauses.

The set of accomplished essays also approximates the communicative purpose of the student essays: Both sets were written to persuade their audience to accept a certain point of view. A match for audience, though desired, appears unobtainable given the difference between essays written for examinations and those written for publication.

The individual editorials were selected randomly after meeting my criteria for length. I analyzed 5 editorials from The New York Times, the editorial content of which is considered to be of high quality; 5 more from the New York Daily News, considered in the newspaper industry to be of medium quality; and 5 from the New York Post, considered to be of lower quality.

My choice of 5 editorials from each of these newspapers, representing a range of newspaper quality from

high to low, engenders a secondary hypothesis, explored here only on an initial, preliminary level. The hypothesis is that if the assessments by ETS indeed reflect essay quality, the selections from the higher-quality newspapers should have slightly more sequential progressions than the lower-quality newspapers, which should have a higher level of parallel progressions.

In the analysis that follows, I adhere as closely as possible to the coding guidelines for topical structure analysis given in the appendix of Schneider and Connor (1991: 427) in an attempt to replicate their identification and categorizations of topical progressions. For convenience, I include the referent of a topic in brackets for pronouns, synonyms, and so forth.

Topical Structure Charts

The New York Times
Analysis No. 1
The editorial diagrammed below appeared in *The New York Times* of Dec. 9, 1998, Page A28, under the headline "The Election Commissioners' Duty." The text of the editorial is as follows:

The Federal Election Commission, an autonomous agency of six members appointed by Congress, has a duty today to condemn and punish the illegal fund-raising by President Clinton and Bob Dole in the 1996 election. Both candidates raised and spent millions of dollars in clear violation of election laws in effect for most of this century.

Last week it was disclosed that the commission staff had found that, after Mr. Clinton and Mr. Dole pledged to limit their own fund-raising as a condition for receiving Federal subsidies, both then illegally used their party machinery to raise and spend millions more than the law allows. The subterfuge was that the party used unregulated ''soft money'' to pay for ''issue ads'' that did not expressly advocate the election of the candidate.

Some commissioners have suggested there is ambiguity as to whether the law applies to ads that do not mention candidates. But in nearly 15 years of rulings, the commission has found that such explicit language is not necessary for the ads to be considered campaign ads. The Democratic ads had some of the same language and images as the regular Clinton campaign ads, and Mr. Clinton planned the ads just as he planned his own re-election.

Whether or not the commissioners approve the millions of dollars in payments to the Federal Government recommended as punishment for violating the law, they must clearly affirm that the Clinton and Dole campaigns violated the election statutes. Anything less would subvert the laws the commissioners are sworn to uphold.

```
Discourse topic = illegal fund-raising by Dole and Clinton
1. Federal Election Commission
2.   both candidates [ref=Clinton and Dole]
3.   both [ref=Clinton and Dole]
4.        the party
5.             ambiguity
6.                  explicit language
7.                      the Democratic ads
8.                          Mr. Clinton
9. they [the federal election commissioners]
10.                                  the laws
```

Summary of Analysis No. 1

Publication =	Times
T-units =	10
Parallel progressions =	1
Extended parallel progressions =	1
Sequential progressions =	8
s-prog ratio =	9/10
p-prog ratio =	1/10
Percent s-prog =	90%
Percent p-prog =	10%

Analysis No. 2

The editorial diagrammed below appeared in *The New York Times* of Dec. 15, 1998, Page A26, under the headline "Mr. Vacco Confronts Reality." The text of the editorial is as follows:

New York State's Attorney General, Dennis Vacco, finally conceded defeat yesterday -- 41 days after the polls closed. His incendiary six-week fight to prevent the certification of his Democratic challenger, Eliot Spitzer, failed to turn up hard evidence of even one fraudulent vote cast, much less the widespread vote fraud he and his Republican enablers loudly proclaimed.

Mr. Vacco's unsuccessful quest to get the New York City police to canvass challenged voters has left a bitter taste in minority neighborhoods. Gov. George Pataki remained curiously aloof from this travesty. But he can begin to repair some of the damage by moving to replace its mastermind, the state Republican chairman, William Powers.

Mr. Vacco, to his credit, says he will now work with Mr. Spitzer to insure that there is no disruption in cases under litigation. As for Mr. Spitzer, his early steps are encouraging. He plans to restore the anti-discrimination protection for homosexual and lesbian staff members that Mr. Vacco rescinded four years ago, and to allow capable lawyers on the staff to remain, in contrast to Mr. Vacco's treatment of the office as a patronage haven. He is also planning lawsuits and other initiatives on behalf of consumers, the environment and civil rights, potentially reviving the office as one of the nation's premier public law agencies.

Discourse topic = attorney general Vacco's fight to prevent certification of challenger
1. New York State's Attorney General, Dennis Vacco
2.　his fight
3.　　　quest ... (derivative)
4.　　　　Governor Pataki
5.　　　　he [ref=Pataki]
6. Mr. Vacco
7.　　　　　Mr. Spitzer
8.　　　　　he [ref=Spitzer]
9.　　　　　he

Summary of Analysis No. 2

Publication =	Times
T-units =	9
Parallel progressions =	3
Extended parallel progressions =	1
Sequential progressions =	5
s-prog ratio =	5/9
p-prog ratio =	3/9
Percent s-prog =	55%
Percent p-prog =	33%

Analysis No. 3
The editorial diagrammed below appeared in *The New York Times* of Dec. 14, 1998, Page A30, under the headline "The Science of Silicone Implants." The text of the editorial is as follows:

A court-appointed panel of experts has concluded that existing scientific evidence does not show a link between silicone breast implants and systemic disease. Federal Judge Sam Pointer Jr., who is overseeing breast-implant lawsuits in the Federal courts, convened the panel to advise him on medical evidence surrounding implants. His

approach was unusual in that he sought expert testimony independent of either side in the litigation. That strategy may also be useful in other complex cases where juries and judges are forced to choose between battling experts who may be biased.

Lawyers from both sides will now have the opportunity to question the expert panelists in depositions and to use that testimony in implant trials. The findings should make trials somewhat easier to conduct, and may cause more plaintiffs to settle their claims against the implant manufacturers.

Well before the panel's report, thousands of cases had been settled. Last month, the Dow Corning Corporation, once the leading maker of silicone implants, and representatives of implant plaintiffs formally agreed to a plan that will pay some 170,000 claimants $3.2 billion over 15 years for suffering and the costs of implant removal. Both sides decided that it was better financially to make a deal than to fight out the science in court.

The new report, which will not affect that settlement, puts forward solid conclusions based on multiple studies. But the panel's findings do not represent the last word on implant safety. A National Cancer Institute study of 13,500 women who have had implants is looking at the long-term health impacts. Results from that study will not be available until next year. A panel convened by the Institute of Medicine, an arm of the National Academy of Sciences, is also continuing to review the medical evidence. The report from Judge Pointer's panel shows how much is known. Other scientists are still researching aspects of implants that are not yet known.

Discourse topic = use of scientific evidence in silicone implant disease litigation
1. scientific evidence
2.   Federal Judge Sam Pointer Jr.
3.   his approach
4.   that strategy
5.   lawyers from both sides
6.   the findings
7.   thousands of cases
8.   Dow Corning Corp. and representatives of implant plaintiffs
9.   both sides
10.   the new report
11.   the panel's findings
12.   A National Cancer Institute study
13.   Results from that study
14.   A panel convened by the Institute of Medicine
15.   the report from Judge Pointer's panel
16.   other scientists

Summary of Analysis No. 3
```
Publication =                        Times
T-units =                            16
Parallel progressions =              3
Extended parallel progressions =     2
Sequential progressions =            11
s-prog ratio =                       11/16
p-prog ratio =                       3/16
Percent s-prog =                     68%
Percent p-prog =                     18%
```


Analysis No. 4
The editorial diagrammed below appeared in *The New York Times* of Dec. 18, 1998, Page A24, under the headline "Funds for Smaller Classes." The discourse topic is made apparent only in comments, not in topics. The text of the editorial is as follows:

The New York State Board of Regents has proposed spending $394 million in additional state aid next year to help students primarily in impoverished and rural school districts reach the state's more rigorous learning standards. It also wants $491 million more for operating and building aid to schools throughout the state. The plan is sound. But the Regents are misguided in recommending that $75 million of the increased aid come from money that would otherwise be used for reducing class sizes in kindergarten through third grade.

In 1997 the Legislature approved spending $225 million over three years to cut class sizes, beginning in 1999. This fall Congress also approved legislation that will provide New York State $104.5 million in the coming year to hire more teachers, an essential ingredient for smaller classes. The Federal law that would pay for 30,000 new teachers across the country says the money can be used only to supplement state and local class-size reduction efforts, not to supplant them. The Regents' proposal to redirect the $75 million to other important uses such as tutoring and after-school sessions could run afoul of that prohibition.

The state's goal is to reduce the class sizes in kindergarten through third grade to no more than 20 students, a sharp drop from the current average of 27 in New York City. Even using both Federal and state money, city classrooms are not expected to meet the goal fully until 2007. New York children should not have to languish in large classes when more funding can solve the problem sooner.

```
Discourse topic = Funds for Smaller Classes
1. Board of Regents
2. It [ref=Board of Regents]
3.         The plan
4. the Regents
5.                 the [U.S.] Legislature
6.                 [U.S.] Congress
7.                     the federal law
```

8.   the Regents' proposal [different
referent from "the plan" above]
9.   the state's goal
10.   city classrooms

11.   New York children

Summary of Analysis No. 4
Publication =   Times
T-units =   11
Parallel progressions =   2
Extended parallel progressions = 1
Sequential progressions =   8
s-prog ratio =   8/11
p-prog ratio =   2/11
Percent s-prog =   72%
Percent p-prog =   18%

Analysis No. 5
The editorial diagrammed below appeared in *The New York
Times* of Dec. 18, 1998, Page A24, under the headline
"Cloning a Human Cell." The first sentence of this editorial
shows the difficulty in pinpointing a topic when their is a
sentence embedded in another: "The announcement that South
Korean scientists have cloned a cell from a woman to make an
embryo that is genetically identical to her has yet to be
verified." Could the topic not also be "South Korean
scientists"? The text of the editorial is as follows:

The announcement that South Korean scientists have cloned a cell from a
woman to make an embryo that is genetically identical to her has yet to
be verified. Few details have been made public, and no scientific paper
has been reviewed by experts. But the announcement ought to provoke a
gasp at how rapidly cloning has been surging ahead.

Only some 20 months ago, the world was astonished when scientists in
Scotland reported cloning a cell of an adult sheep to produce a lamb,
showing for the first time that it is possible to make a genetically
identical younger twin of an adult mammal. That achievement took
substantial effort to confirm. But in recent months, advances in cloning
have tumbled forth rapidly.

Scientists in Hawaii reported in July that they had created dozens of
clones of adult mice, and scientists in Japan reported this month that
they had cloned cow cells to produce eight calves. Whether or not the
Koreans have cloned a human, there seems little doubt that it could be
done.

The Korean researchers moved cautiously through some ethical minefields.
Their experiment was terminated after the embryo had divided into four
cells. That is too soon, some experts say, to determine whether
development of the embryo was really being driven by genetic material

from the mother. But the Koreans made it unmistakably clear they had
no intent of implanting the embryo into a woman's uterus so that it
could develop into a child. They thus avoided the step that troubles
many ethicists and citizens, who fear cloning will inevitably undermine
human individuality.

The United States has only begun to debate the ethical pros and cons of
cloning humans, secure until now in the belief that there is time for
such ruminations. The lesson from recent studies is that time is fast
running out.

Discourse topic = Korean researcher's cloning of a human
cell
1. the announcement
2.   few details
3.   no scientific paper
4. the announcement
5.   scientists in Scotland
6.   that achievement
7.   advances in cloning
8.   Scientists in Hawaii
9.   scientists in Japan
10.   it [ref=cloning of a human]
11.   Korean researchers
12.   their experiment
13.   development of
the embryo
14.   the Koreans
15.   they
16.   the United
States
17.   the
lesson from recent studies

Summary of Analysis No. 5
Publication =   Times
T-units =   17
Parallel progressions =   2
Extended parallel progressions =   3
Sequential progressions =   12
s-prog ratio =   12/17
p-prog ratio =   2/17
Percent s-prog =   70%
Percent p-prog =   11%

New York Daily News
Analysis No. 6
The editorial diagrammed below appeared in *New York Daily
News* of Dec. 9, 1998, Page 42, under the headline "Twisted

justice." The text of the editorial is as follows:

Ruth Sherman, the teacher who was threatened by parents and suspended for sharing the book "Nappy Hair" with her students at Public School 75 in Brooklyn, has resettled at another school in Queens. That's a bittersweet victory for Sherman, but a solid defeat for the 26 students from her third-grade class at PS 75.

Give an F to the parents who drove Sherman away. They would do well to ponder why 50 of them could show up for this "Nappy Hair" debacle but only four made an appearance in October at a meeting to discuss the school's abysmal reading scores. Less then 30% of the kids read at or above grade level.

The Board of Education deserves an F-minus for not coming out in loud, strong support of Sherman from the beginning. A private letter from Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew a few days after the controversy erupted is too little too late.

The winners are the kids at PS 131 in Jamaica Estates, Queens. They get a dedicated, enthusiastic teacher. But this is a case of the rich getting richer. At this school, 70% of students read at or above grade level, one of the highest rates in the city.

Sherman, who came to PS 75 three years ago as a volunteer reading assistant, was needed at PS 75, a school on the state's SURR list of failing schools. "I knew I could make a difference," the young teacher said.

So when a spot opened up this year to teach full-time, she jumped at the chance. She brought energy and a desire to reach kids. And, like many dedicated New York teachers, she used her own money to buy supplies and books. In Sherman's two years as reading instructor, third-grade reading scores improved -- from 30.1% to 36.8% reading at or above grade.

Let's hope what happened at PS 75 is a lesson and a wakeup call to parents. Lest they drive away all those who dare to care.

Discourse topic = Sherman's being driven away from teaching at a school
1. Ruth Sherman
2.   that [ref=the resettling]
3.   the parents who drove Sherman away
4.   they [ref=parents]
5.   kids (at PS 75)
6.   the Board of Education
7.   a private letter
8.   kids at PS 131
9.   they
10.   this [PS 131 gets teacher]
11.   students (at PS 131)
12. Sherman
13. the young teacher [ref=Sherman]
14. she [ref=Sherman]

15. she
16. she
17.   reading scores (at
PS 75) 18.   what
happened at PS 75
19.   they
[ref=all parents]

Summary of Analysis No. 6

Publication =   Daily News
T-units =   19
Parallel progressions =   6
Extended parallel progressions =   2
Sequential progressions =   11
s-prog ratio =   11/19
p-prog ratio =   6/19
Percent s-prog =   57%
Percent p-prog =   31%

Analysis No. 7
The editorial diagrammed below appeared in *New York Daily
News* of Dec. 4, 1998, Page 54, under the headline "Fewer
murders, they wrote." This editorial also offers a sentence
in which it is difficult to ascertain the topic. The opening
sentence is, "The good news on crime continues, with the
best part the incredible drop in murders." Is the topic
"crime" or "the drop in murders"? Again, I deferred to the
sentential subject and chose "crime." The text of the
editorial is as follows:

The good news on crime continues, with the best part the incredible drop
in murders. According to the NYPD's latest figures, 566 murders were
reported in the five boroughs from Jan. 1 through last Sunday. If the
rate remains steady -- and there's only a month to go -- the city will
register the lowest annual number of homicides in 35 years. The toll in
1963 was 548; 1998's projected tally, about 620.

This is a stunning decrease. If you are not suitably stunned, you are
either from out of town and unfamiliar with the bloody data of
yesteryear(s) or you have the emotions of a blunt instrument. In New
York City, an annual total of 620 murders is the stuff of astonished
gasps -- as opposed to last gasps.

Less than a decade ago, in 1991, 2,245 homicides were recorded in the
city. If things had thus continued -- and we're talking just status quo,
never mind any increases -- the years '92 through '98 would have brought
a total of 15,715 violent deaths. Even subtracting the murders that *did*
occur over that time period, the number of lives preserved is pretty
impressive. Thousands upon thousands of New Yorkers, the equivalent of
the population of some entire towns -- are walking around and smelling
the roses instead of being 6 fee under them.

For that, they and everybody else can thank that army of men and women in blue who are out on the streets -- and in the subways and the housing projects -- every day, every night, risking their lives so the civilian population is safe. They protect, they serve and they do one helluva job.

Next time you see a cop, say, "Thank you."

Discourse topic = decrease in New York City's murder rate
1. crime
2.   566 murders
3.   the [murder] rate
4.   the toll in 1963
5.   1998's projected tally
6.   this [ref=the projected tally]
7.   you
8.   an annual total of 620
9.   homicides [in 1991]
10.   the years '92 through '98
11.   the number of lives preserved
12.   New Yorkers
13.   army of mean and women in blue
14.   they
15.   you

Summary of Analysis No. 7
Publication =   Daily News
T-units =   15
Parallel progressions =   3
Extended parallel progressions =   1
Sequential progressions =   11
s-prog ratio =   11/15
p-prog ratio =   3/15
Percent s-prog =   73%
Percent p-prog =   20%

Analysis No. 8
The editorial diagrammed below appeared in *New York Daily News* of Dec. 2, 1998, Page 48, under the headline "One for the road?" The text of the editorial is as follows:

Police Officer Daniel O'Sullivan, 25 years old and fighting for his life at new York Hospital medical Center of Queens, realized his boyhood dream of becoming a cop just last year. Now, thanks to a drunken driver, that dream has been shattered.

When you toss back a couple and then get behind the wheel, do you ever

think you might be the cause of such physical and emotional devastation? Or are you just not thinking at all?

Incredibly, there were *three* drivers charged with DWI at the site of the Grand Central Parkway crash where O'Sullivan was critically injured early Sunday. Each one had swerved his way there separately. Giving credence, if one needed that, to a frightening bit of data. Namely, that between 1 a.m. and 6 a.m. on any given weekend, one in every seven drivers is drunk.

O'Sullivan, off-duty but a 24/7 cop, had stopped to assist at a two-car accident; one of the motorists involved in that fender-bender had been drinking, police said. Then another auto, allegedly operated by another drunken driver, plowed into O'Sullivan's car, causing a chain reaction that crushed the officer. Later, yet a third motorist was arrested at the scene for DWI while driving through traffic cones police had set up.

That's at least three people who had no qualms about driving drunk. Anyone want to guess how many others were out on the Grand Central in the wee small hours? Seems it might be time to set up a few more DWI checkpoints. Now that one of their own has been hurt, perhaps the NYPD might direct more energy in this direction, and on a consistent basis.

According to federal statistics, 16,189 people were killed in alcohol-related crashes last year; that translates to 38.6% of traffic deaths. Accidents involving alcohol injured 1,058,990 people.

Obviously, too many drivers still haven't gotten the message. Or have chosen to ignore it. Anyone for a little overdue retribution? The more of these losers who get tossed into jail, the fewer there will be creating carnage on the highways.

```
Discourse topic = drunken drivers
1. Police Officer Daniel O'Sullivan
2    that dream
3.      you [ref=reader(s)]
4.      you
5.        three drivers
6.           each one (of the drivers)
7.             a frightening bit of data
8.               one in every seven drivers
9. O'Sullivan
10.         one of the motorists
11.               another auto
12.                 a third motorist
14.     at least three people [ref=three drivers]
15.                   others [ref=drunken drivers]
16.               DWI checkpoints
17.                   the NYPD
18.                   16,189 people
19.                     that
20.                       accidents involving
alcohol
21.                 many drivers [ref=drunken
```

drivers]
22.   retribution
23.   these losers [ref=drunken
drivers]

Summary of Analysis No. 8
Publication =   Daily News
T-units =   23
Parallel progressions =   1
Extended parallel progressions = 6
Sequential progressions =   16
s-prog ratio =   16/23
p-prog ratio =   1/23
Percent s-prog =   69%
Percent p-prog =   4%

Analysis No. 9
The editorial diagrammed below appeared in *New York Daily News* of Dec. 28, 1998, Page 26, under the headline "Union warning." The text of the editorial is as follows:

On today's Op-Ed Page, Lee Saunders, the administrator of District Council 37, details the excellent measures he is taking to solve the serious problems gripping the city's largest municipal union. From instituting financial audits to finding ways to protect future contract votes from fraud, Saunders is laying down the law in a seemingly lawless union.

But it is the penultimate paragraph in Saunders' article that raises a red flag for New Yorkers. "We are moving beyond the crises we face to take a more aggressive, pro-active stance on key issues such as workfare, privatization, health care and negotiations over the next collective bargaining agreement."

While Saunders must represent his 125,000 members, he is bound for conflict with Mayor Giuliani if "aggressive" is really just a synonym for a rollback of workfare and privatization. Both programs have been of enormous benefit to the entire city.

Saunders has said privatization "is not the approach to take." In some cases, that's simply not true. Indeed, if anything, Giuliani hasn't done enough of it. Bound too often by arcane work rules and excessive costs, the city must find more efficient ways to do its business. To compete with privatization, DC 37 must offer more productivity gains, not merely pound the table.

Ditto for the Work Experience Program. By and large, workfare has worked. The cycle of handout dependency has been snapped for many recipients and the city has cleaner parks and highways. Stanley Hill, the suspended DC 37 chief, forged a pact of mutual trust with Giuliani. Because of it, the city resists the temptation to replace city workers with the WEP force. Complaints that workfare is taking union jobs are taken seriously.

By any means, Saunders must clean up the disgraceful mess at his union.
But his job isn't to determine city policy. the voters and the people
they elect get to make those choices.

Discourse topic = Saunders' approach to solving union's
problems
1. Lee Saunders
2. Saunders
3.   the penultimate paragraph
4.   we
5. Saunders
6.   privatization
7.   that
8.   Guiliani
9.   the city
10.   Stanley Hill
11.   the city
12.   complaints
13. Saunders
14.   his job
15.   the voters
and the people

Summary of Analysis No. 9

Publication =	Daily News
T-units =	15
Parallel progressions =	1
Extended parallel progressions =	3
Sequential progressions =	11
s-prog ratio =	11/15
p-prog ratio =	1/15
Percent s-prog =	73%
Percent p-prog =	6.6%

Analysis No. 10

The editorial diagrammed below appeared in *New York Daily
News* of Dec. 28, 1998, Page 26, under the headline "Fixing
New York's death penalty." The text of the editorial is as
follows:

When the legislature returns to Albany next week, the first on its
agenda should be fixing the state's death penalty law. The repair is
urgent because New York's highest court struck down part of the 1995
law.

The Court of Appeals determined unanimously that is unconstitutional to
give accused killers the option to escape death and be sentenced to life
in prison by pleading guilty while those who invoke their right to a
jury trial still face capital punishment. As Chief Judge Judith Kaye

wrote: "The death penalty hangs over only those who exercise their constitutional rights to maintain innocence and demand a jury trial."

In truth, the court had little choice, because the U.S. Supreme court held 30 years ago that such squeeze plays violate both the Fifth Amendment's guarantee against self-incrimination and the Sixth Amendment's right to a jury trial.

So the ruling injects more fairness into the law -- and gives the Legislature an opening to rethink other flaws. the most glaring of these is the discretion allowed prosecutors in whether to seek capital punishment in first-degree murder cases.

Too often, local prosecutors abuse that power. For example, since the death penalty was reinstated three years ago, Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau has refused to seek capital punishment in any of the 19 first-degree murder cases he has prosecuted. And he refuses to given [SIC] reasons.

The solution is to take the discretion out of prosecutors' hands. Justice would be better served if juries decided which defendants convicted of first-degree murder deserve to die for their crime. That wouldn't change where the decision is ultimately made. Under the current law, juries make the final decision about death in the penalty phase of a capital trial.

The difference would be that if the law were fixed, the option for either penalty would remain open to the jury at all times. That way, prosecutors would not be able to make life-or-death decisions based on their personal prerogative.

With the plea-bargain option gone, the temptation becomes even stronger for prosecutors to give killers a break. Removing DAs from the death decision would make the law fully constitutional and keep faith with the public's will to punish the most heinous killers with the ultimate penalty.

The Court of Appeals also deserves credit for another move that improves the law. It reduced the feeds paid to court-appointed lawyers who represent poor defendants in capital cases. After two years of haggling, the court lowered the rate from $300 an hour -- which made capital cases prohibitively expensive -- to $125 an hour, which is what attorneys get in federal cases.

Discourse topic = New York's death penalty
1. the legislature
2.   the repair
3.   the Court of Appeals
4.   the death penalty
5.   the court [ref=Court of Appeals]
6.   the ruling
7.   these [ref=other flaws]
8.   local prosecutors
9.   Manhattan DA Robert Morgenthau
10.   he [ref=Morgenthau]
11.   the solution

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12.                     justice
13.                       that
14.                         juries
15.                           the difference
16.            prosecutors
17.            prosecutors
18.                                      Removing DAs from the
...
19.  the Court of Appeals
20.  it
21.  the court
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Summary of Analysis No. 10

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Publication =                     Daily News
T-units =                         21
Parallel progressions =           4
Extended parallel progressions =  3
Sequential progressions =         14
s-prog ratio =                    14/21
p-prog ratio =                    4/21
Percent s-prog =                  66%
Percent p-prog =                  4.7%
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The New York Post
Analysis No. 11

The editorial diagrammed below appeared in *New York Post* of Dec. 12, 1998, Page 18, under the headline "Bill Clinton's Day of Infamy." The editorial opens with an example of a sentence in which identifying the topic is difficult: Is it Clinton or speech? The sentence seems to be about the speech; the main idea, however, could be considered to be Clinton. I deferred to the sentential subject, choosing Clinton. Regardless of which is the topic, though, the editorial is interesting because it relies nearly exclusively on parallel progression. The text of the editorial is as follows:

In his astounding four-minute speech yesterday -- astounding because of its almost awe-inspiring disingenuousness -- President Clinton spoke of his "wrongdoing." He apologized "for all I have done wrong in words and deeds" -- a formulation he apparently just loved, since a few sentences later he was again referring to "my errors of word and deed." He said he "misled" the country with his "wrongful conduct."

But never once did he say what he had done that had caused him to feel such "profound remorse."

Rather than come clean and admit his deliberate and self-conscious stream of lies from January through August -- both lies under oath and finger-wagging lies thrown right in the face of the people who employ

him -- the president turned weirdly masochistic.

He said he was "ready to accept" the Congress' "rebuke and censure" because he had just been so darn mean -- especially to his family, which is in more pain than the country due to his actions.

He even took the opportunity to express thanks to his "accusers" because, as Ben Franklin said, "our critics are our friends, for they do show us our faults."

But Clinton never said he lied.

Which means he's still doing it.

If yesterday's speech was meant to be the president's plea for clemency from the members of Congress who now have to vote on the articles of impeachment forwarded to the full House by the Judiciary Committee, it came months too late and several dollars short.

Bill Clinton is only the third president in history who has had articles of impeachment moved to the House floor, joining Andrew Johnson and Richard Nixon in the ranks for infamy.

Good.

Discourse topic = Clinton's speech
1. President Clinton
2. he
3. he
4. he
5. the president
6. he
7. he
8. Clinton
9. he
10.   speech
11. Bill Clinton

Summary of Analysis No. 11

Publication =	Post
T-units =	11
Parallel progressions =	8
Extended parallel progressions =	1
Sequential progressions =	2
s-prog ratio =	2/11
p-prog ratio =	8/11
Percent s-prog =	18%
Percent p-prog =	72%

Analysis No. 12
The editorial diagrammed below appeared in *New York Post* of

Dec. 22, 1998, Page 32, under the headline "She Loves Stalinists and Murderers." The text of the editorial is as follows:

Rep. Maxine Waters loves to suck up. She spent her time during the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment hearings sucking up to Bill Clinton. And it turns out that, earlier this year, she wrote a letter simultaneously sucking up to a Stalinist tyrant and a cop-killer.

Back in September, the House voted on a bill demanding that Cuba extradite cop-killer Joanne Chesimard. In 1973, Chesimard shot two New Jersey stat troopers, killing one and wounding the other. Ever since her 1979 escape from prison and subsequent flight to Cuba, Chesimard has been one of America's most-wanted exiles.

Waters voted for the extradition of Chesimard, but quickly realized that Republicans had tricked her. She dashed off an apologetic note to Fidel Castro, stating that Republicans had acted with "deceptive intent" in mentioning only Joanne Chesimard, "the birth name of a political activity known to most members of the Congressional Black Caucus as Assata Shakur."

During her days as a civil-rights activity, Assata Shakur was a leader of the Black Panthers and a member of the Black Liberation Army. Waters' "Dear Fidel" letter explained that she is opposed to Shakur's extradition because the congresswoman "respect[s] the right of Assata Shakur to seek political asylum. Assata Shakur has maintained that she was persecuted as a result of her political beliefs and political affiliations.

If Waters can turn a blind eye to the execution-style murder of a state trooper, is it any wonder that she did the same for President Clinton's wrongs.

Or is sucking up all she knows how to do?

Discourse topic = Rep. Maxine Waters' sucking up
1. Rep. Maxine Waters
2. she
3. she
4.   the house
5.   Chesimard
6.   Chesimard
7. Waters
8. she [ref=Waters]
9.   Assata Shakur [ref=Chesimard; it is her alias, and as such a synonym.)
10.   Water's "Dear Fidel" letter
11.   Assata Shakur
12. she [ref=Waters]
13.   sucking up

Summary of Analysis No. 12
Publication =   Post

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T-units =                              13
Parallel progressions =        4
Extended parallel progressions =   4
Sequential progressions =      5
s-prog ratio =                 5/13
p-prog ratio =                 4/13
Percent s-prog =               38%
Percent p-prog =               30%
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Analysis No. 13
The editorial diagrammed below appeared in *New York Post* of Dec. 22, 1998, Page 32, under the headline "Another Death-Penalty Sham." The text of the editorial is as follows:

James Allen Gordon won't be increasing the population of New York state's re-constituted death row by one. On Friday, a Queens jury (which had earlier convicted him of first-degree murder) decided that life in prison was sufficient punishment for his brutal slaughter of three young women in 1996.

Chalk one up for what might be called the "Oprah Phase" of New York state capital-murder trials -- the phase that Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and his Criminal Caucus insisted upon as their price for bringing back the death penalty.

Using a pistol, a hammer and several knives, Gordon raped and killed three young women and assaulted and wounded two others (one of whom was the twin sister of one of the murder victims). And all to settle a $50 drug debt.

Taking full advantage of the Democrats' provisions, which allow the defendant almost unlimited sob-story time without rebuttal by the families of the victims, Gordon predictably painted a picture of a grim childhood.

He never knew his biological father; he lived with his heroin-addicted mother, who had a succession of violent boyfriends. Joanne Patterson, an aunt, described Gordon as "a tragedy waiting to happen." His tearful younger sister screamed, "Please don't kill my brother!"

None of this impressed Latisha Griffith, the twin sister who survived Gordon's rampage. "My sister was pleading for her life, and he didn't give a damn," she said. And, as the prosecution pointed out, while James and his sister grew up in the same circumstances, she did not become a killer, and is in fact gainfully employed.

As we have said before, it will truly be a miracle if anyone on New York's death row dies of anything buy old age. The law is designed to give the defendant every possible break while denying justice to the victims, their survivors and society at large for as long as legally possible.

Discourse topic = New York's death-penalty laws

1. James Allen Gordon
2.   a Queens jury
3.   New York state capital-murder trials
4. Gordon
5.   all [ref=raping and killing]
6. Gordon
7. he [ref=Gordon]
8. he [ref=Gordon]
9.   Joanne Patterson
10.   His tearful younger sister [ref of his=Gordon]
11.   Latisha Griffith
12.   my sister [ref of my=Griffith]
13. he [ref=Gordon]
14.   she [ref=Gordon's sister]
15.   New York's death row
16.   the law

Summary of Analysis No. 13

Publication =	Post
T-units =	16
Parallel progressions =	2
Extended parallel progressions =	4
Sequential progressions =	10
s-prog ratio =	10/16
p-prog ratio =	2/16
Percent s-prog =	62%
Percent p-prog =	12%

Analysis No. 14

The editorial diagrammed below appeared in *New York Post* of Dec. 26, 1998, Page 18, under the headline "No More Taxpayer $$ for Campaigns." The text of the editorial is as follows:

So the Federal Election Commission has decided that the 1996 Clinton and Dole campaigns do not have to repay a total of $25 million in contributions that the commission's staff claimed exceeded the campaign spending limits federal law places on candidates who receive taxpayer matching funds.

Well, it's not like anyone really expected anything else. Divided evenly between three Republicans and three Democrats, the FEC has never been noted for politically risky decisions.

What both candidates did was use the "soft-money" exception -- the rule that says that limits on fund-raising don't apply to cash raised by the political parties for "party-building" purposes -- to raise money for their own campaigns.

Clinton and dole resorted to this tactic because both accepted public financing of their fall campaigns -- to the tune of $29 million each -- and therefore agreed to abide by restrictions on how the rest of their money was raised.

The bottom line? The FEC's non-action clears the way for more such shenanigans in the year 2000 by a whole new crop of candidates.

Since the candidates are going to do these end-runs around the post-Watergate campaign finance reforms anyway, why not at least get the taxpayer out of the picture.

The system of public financing for presidential candidates is massively unpopular. Just last July, the FEC reported that only 13 percent of income-tax filers now check the box that devotes $3 of their taxes to the presidential campaign fund. That means the fund is likely to have a deficit in 2000.

Maybe then we can get to a system in which candidates can accept campaign contributions from anyone in any amount and post the results on the Internet. Any effort to violate such a practice could become a matter of criminal, rather than civil, law.

Letting the voters decided whether their candidate is bought and paid for would be the best campaign-finance reform of all.

Discourse topic = campaign finance reform
1. the Federal Election Commission
2. the FEC
3.   both candidates [ref=Clinton and Dole]
4.   Clinton and Dole
5.   the FEC's non-action
6.   the candidates [ref=any presidential candidates]
7.   the system of public finance for presidential candidates
8.   13 percent of income-tax filers
9.   the fund
10.   a system
11.   any effort
12.   campaign-finance reform

Summary of Analysis No. 14
Publication =   Post
T-units =   12
Parallel progressions =   2
Extended parallel progressions =   0
Sequential progressions =   10
s-prog ratio =   10/12
p-prog ratio =   2/12
Percent s-prog =   83.3%

Percent p-prog =   16.6%

Analysis No. 15
The editorial diagrammed below appeared in *New York Post* of
Dec. 26, 1998, Page 18, under the headline "The Grinch Who
Stole Boxing Day." The text of the editorial is as follows:

Forget the traditional afternoon with the kiddies at "Peter and the
Wolf" today. The Little Orchestra Society, a New York City institution
in both senses of the word, has announced that its unionized musicians
are too disgruntled to perform the holiday children's classic. These
grinches -- members of the Associated Musicians of Greater New York,
Local 802 -- won't lift a finger because they've rejected a management-
proposed contract.

To top it off, the 10 performances were to ring in the 50th anniversary
of LOS Children's Concerts.

Some union leaders need their ears boxed on Boxing Day.

This selfish union's pouting routine is woefully misguided. Where's the
sense in classical musicians limiting young peoples' access to classical
music? Instead of enjoying the musical fairy tale, the kids will sit
around watching "Power Rangers in Space" -- then on to the Backstreet
Boys and whoever's taking the place of the Spice Girls. Forget
Prokofiev.

Where's an oboeist going to find work in 20 years if some 7-year-olds
don't hear "Peter and the Wolf" today?

Union heartlessness doesn't stop there. Earlier this month, the Fort
Worth, Texas, Christian University Symphonic Choir trundled all the way
to New York City only to find that its concert was canceled because of a
labor dispute: The New York Pops Orchestra, also part of Local 802, was
on strike.

Turning away fellow performers and the ticket-buying public is no way to
garner sympathy for the cause.

Whatever happened to "The show must go on"?

Discourse topic = union musicians' strike
1. "Peter and the Wolf"
2.   the Little Orchestra Society
3.   members of the Associated Musicians of Greater New
York
4.   the 10 performances
5.   Some union leaders
6.   routine
7.   classical musicians
8.   the kids
9.   Prokofiev
10.   an oboeist
11.   Union heartlessness
12.   Symphonic Choir

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13.                              New York Pops
Orchestra
14.                                 Turning away ...
performers and ... public
15.                                  the show
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Summary of Analysis No. 15

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Publication =                    Post
T-units =                        15
Parallel progressions =          0
Extended parallel progressions = 0
Sequential progressions =        15
s-prog ratio =                   15/15
p-prog ratio =                   0/15
Percent s-prog =                 100%
Percent p-prog =                 0%
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Results

Table 1. Descriptive statistics on t-units and topical progressions for all editorials and letters to editor

n	T-units M	P-prog M	S-prog M
15	14.86	19%	66.28%

Table 2. Descriptive statistics on t-units and topical progressions for *Times* editorials

n	T-units M	P-prog M	S-prog M
5	12.6	18%	71%

Table 3. Descriptive statistics on t-units and topical progressions for *Daily News* editorials

n	T-units M	P-prog M	S-prog M
5	18.6	13.26%	67.6%

Table 4. Descriptive statistics on t-units and topical progressions for *Post* editorials

n	T-units M	P-prog M	S-prog M
5	13.4	26%	60.26%

Discussion of Results

My secondary hypothesis – that the highest-quality newspaper

will have a higher percentage of sequential progressions –

is partly confirmed: The New York Times, the newspaper reputedly with the highest-quality editorial content, has the greatest proportion of sequential progressions, but not the lowest proportion of parallel progressions, a ranking claimed by the Daily News, which in turn used more extended parallel progressions than either the Times or the Post. The Post has the highest percentage of parallel progressions.

More importantly, the study reveals that accomplished essays do in fact have similar patterns of topical progression as the student essays rated high by evaluators. Since I closely matched the mean length of my samples (14.86 t-units) to the mean length of Schneider and Connor's student essays (14.11 t-units), the percentages of topical structure in the accomplished essays can be reasonably compared to those of the student essays after they were discounted for length. The high-rated essays in Schneider and Connor's study contained a mean parallel progression of 6 percent and a mean sequential progression of 80 percent. The accomplished essays had a mean parallel progression of 19 percent and a mean sequential progression of 66 percent. In contrast, the set of lowest-rated student essays in Schneider and Connor's study contained a mean parallel progression of 31 percent and a mean sequential progression of 47 percent.

CONCLUSION

This essay has investigated whether accomplished essays contain the same patterns as ESL essays rewarded by test examiners. The sample of accomplished essays are assumed to represent, at least as a first approximation, the norms of professional published English writing, including their underlying structures, within the essays' genre in English. The essays, that is, represent the tacit norms of underlying topical structure within the genre. The accomplished essays contain similar patterns of topical structure to the high-rated student essays in Schneider and Connor's study. The accomplished essays, like the high-rated student essays, contain a large proportion of coherence-building sequential progression and a small proportion of parallel progressions.

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